



MODERN CHINA

CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Edited by
Geeta Kochhar

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Society, Culture and Literature

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9 LOVE AND SOCIETY IN THE WORKS OF ZHANG JIE AND SHEN RONG

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Women in Chinese society have a long history of suppression and domination. China being traditionally a patriarchal, feudal male-dominated society always looked at women as inferior beings and treated them as mere objects whose position was within the house and to serve the needs of men. The Confucian hierarchy system reinforced the superior status of men and put women at the bottom of the social strata. Things began to change around the turn of the 19th century with reform movements. The early 20th century marked a change in the situation of women in China. The May Fourth Movement, also known as the New Culture Movement,

stimulated and galvanised an incipient cultural movement growing since the late 19th century that was directed at throwing off the weight of China's Confucian tradition and absorbing Western culture. This cultural movement culminated in the early decades of 20th century in a literary flowering that was one of the most creative and brilliant episodes in Modern Chinese history.

(Goldman, 1989: 1)

It was during this time that women who were educated under the influence of Western thoughts and ideas rose against the age-old traditions and protested to make their voices heard.

The women writers during this period were informed and influenced by this enlightenment movement and participated in political and social campaigns propagating 'liberation of self', 'women emancipation', 'freedom of marriage' and 'individualism'. Intellectuals like Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Mao Dun and so forth talked about the position of women as individuals in the society. Hu Shi in his famous essay talked about 'Ibsenism' and Lu Xun discussed the problems women face even if they were to leave the house like 'Nora'. The questions raised by Lu

Xun were as relevant then as they are now. He propagated economic, social and political freedom for women. Many women writers such as Bing Xin, Lu Yin, Ling Shuhua and Bai Wei appeared on the literary scene. These women writers and others such as Ding Ling and Su Xuelin who entered the literary circle later talked about self-liberation as part of the bigger social campaign of eradicating the Confucian traditional thought from Modern Chinese society. Their writing focused on the social issues and talked about women emancipation as part of the bigger social project, and therefore when the literature turned to becoming political and focused on the socialist revolution, the women writers also ceased to write works with 'oneself' as the object. War of resistance against Japanese invasion called for a literature of patriotic heroism. Again, the women's issues took a back seat, with the focus on the revolution.

The literature that came after liberation during the '17 years period' was state controlled and most of the works during that time showed noble, great proletariat heroes and heroines who, with no lovers or husband, happily dedicate their lives to the revolution and the party. The female characters show no sexual characteristics whatsoever. Women in Mao's China held up half the sky; they were equal to men and they were expected to work like men and dress like men. Mao's iron girl (*tie guniang*) was a 'defeminised revolutionary model functioning to promote a heroic utopian cause' (Jiang, 2000: 28). The women during this time enjoyed equal rights as men but lost their subjectivity as 'I' to the greater 'We'. Margery Wolf in her book mentions,

Although the Marriage Law and Agrarian Reform Law seemed to provide women with property rights and real property, in reality the lofty theories of gender equality the party proclaimed failed to change the attitudes and conditions that held women in their inferior position. The measures set up to promote equality between men and women were not thoroughly implemented, especially because the cadres in charge of carrying out the reforms that were designed to benefit women were, in fact, men who didn't want to give up their control of family property or relinquish their authority over the other half of society.

(Wolf, 1985: 19)

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the literary field was once again opened for creative production. The silence in the area of literature that had lasted for more than a decade was broken by sudden outpourings of work and writers. This has been termed as the second

'high tide' of women writers. The women writers re-discovered their identity as women, and after a long time, they were able to write from their viewpoint. They could now experiment with narrative modes and through their works discuss and bring out in the open 'women issues'. It is important to note that with the opening up of the literary field and economic reform, Western literary works, trends and thoughts entered Chinese society and Western feminist theories were introduced. Although women writers and critics in China mostly deny the title 'feminist' and reject the Western style of feminism and state that it does not conform with Chinese reality, many of the works by these women writers have been read as feminist works. Hui Wu in her article advocates the need for an 'Enlightened Feminist Rhetorical Theory' which incorporates the political and social position of women in China.

Zhang Jie and Shen Rong, two representative women writers of this time, were both middle-aged when they expressed their creative powers. Both were born in China when it was struggling with Japanese invasion, reached adulthood during the Cultural Revolution, and were middle-aged when they started writing in late 1970s post-Mao China. They have through their works delved into the inner psyche of Chinese intellectual women and voiced their opinions, inner dilemmas and concerns in a rapidly changing Chinese society.

Framework

This chapter particularly focuses on how these writers have portrayed women in their works and how that reflects on how they perceive women and how that, in turn, reflects how society looks at women. The study raises the question whether the writers have conformed to the traditional notion of a woman or have broken away from that idea. In this study, an attempt has been made to study how they express social issues like women's right to love, marriage and divorce, conflict between career and family and so forth faced by women in early 1980s China and whether they approach these issues similarly or differently. The hypothesis is that because both writers share common historical background, their works are expected to reflect on social issues in a similar fashion. The study is primarily based on historical context and attempts to understand the influence of socio-economic and political conditions during that time on the works of these women writers. In this regard, three works by each writer have been studied: *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, *Emerald* and *The Ark* by Zhang Jie and *Springtime Forever*, *At Middle Age* and *Too Lazy to Divorce* by Shen Rong. *Love*

Must Not Be Forgotten, *The Ark and Emerald* debuted in 1979, 1982 and 1984, respectively. *At Middle Age* was published in 1980, *Springtime Forever* in 1986 and *Too Lazy to Divorce* in 1993.

Literature of the post-Cultural Revolution

The literature that emerged after Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s is of a

political as well as a literary importance; their authors, with varying degrees of sophistication, vividly convey the urgency and intensity of their concerns, and provide valuable insights into the problems being discussed in post-Maoist China.

In this new literary scene, women have emerged as an important creative force. Guaranteed equality by the marriage laws adopted after Liberation and widely acclaimed for "holding up half the sky", women have been assigned jobs in all sectors of the work force. However, these highly visible institutional changes have tended to mask the vestiges of inequality and oppression that persist beneath the surface of society and despite the reforms accomplished by the Chinese Communist party (CCP) and implemented by the Women's Federation. It is these entrenched forms of discrimination and deprivation that women are beginning to explore in fictional contexts.

(Yue and Wakeman, 1983: 879)

In this respect, Zhang Jie emerged as one of the forerunners in the struggle of women writers to bring into light the discrimination faced by women in an economically developing socialist and yet traditional China. Shen Rong, on the other hand, focuses more on the plight of Chinese urban intellectuals and does so with a female consciousness. Therefore, we can through their works see how Chinese women have been portrayed and that, in fact, is informed by their historical conditions. The chapter discusses images of women in their works and the two main themes of love and society, how they express social issues like the right to love and the freedom of marriage and divorce and how the contemporary Chinese society has been reflected in these works.

Women: socialist or traditional? the dilemma

Chinese women who had lost their subjectivity 'I' to the greater 'We' during the Mao era, began to regain their individual female

consciousness. They started to bring up issues that were until now kept under wraps. But they were faced with a dilemma: they were liberated socialist women but still tied to their traditional image of a Chinese woman. Chinese women in the late 1970s and early 1980s as represented in the works of Zhang Jie and Shen Rong are strong-willed socialist women who have a strong sense of social responsibility.

Zhang Jie was born in 1937 and reached adulthood in the idealistic climate of the 1950s and suffered through the Cultural Revolution. Zhang Jie in her works presents women characters that are strongly influenced by both Confucian morality and socialist ideals. Her works became popular for discussing women issues and promoting the assertion of their identity. One of her most celebrated and controversial works, *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, tells the tale of a woman Shanshan who is 30 and still single. After her mother Zhong Yu's death, she finds her diary titled 'Love must not be forgotten'. As she starts reading the diary, she finds herself in her mother's secret world where her mother is passionately in love with an old cadre who is married. Through this story of unrequited love, Shanshan learns a lesson about waiting and not getting married without love. In the character of Zhong Yu, we can see how Zhang Jie has created the image of a woman who loves a married man, which is considered immoral in Chinese society at that time and so she cannot act on it. The fact that she was a divorcée makes her situation sympathetic. Her suffering in love corresponds to the ethos of the society at that time where being in love with a married man was frowned upon. The old cadre is shown to be noble and great for not divorcing his wife who he married out of a sense of responsibility because her father had saved his life. Zhong Yu respects him for this, as Shanshan recalls, 'She once told me that unless she worshipped a man, she couldn't love him even for one day' (Zhang, 1986: 8).

The novella starts with 'I am thirty, the same age as our People's Republic. For a Republic thirty is still young. But a girl of thirty is virtually on the shelf' (Zhang, 1986: 1). This also strikes a chord with women at that time who had lost ten years of their life during the Cultural Revolution and had just returned back to their life and were 30 and still single. In the character of Shanshan, Zhang Jie introduces us to the other generation of women who do not give into the traditional norms of the society. In her later work *Emerald* she introduces us to the two women characters Zeng Linger and Lu Beihe who are both in love with the same man, Zuo Wei. After Zeng Linger refuses to marry him because she realizes that he wants to marry her only out of 'gratefulness' for saving his life and not because he loves her,

Shen Rong's career as a writer, tells the story of a woman ophthalmologist Lu Wenting, who is struggling between her profession and her role in the traditional Chinese society of a wife and a mother.

The story was made into a film based on a script written by Shen Rong herself in 1983. The film became an immediate hit, as it was instantly understood in China as representing the plight of a generation of Chinese intellectuals. Even though the story deals with the plight of middle-aged intellectuals, it also raises the issue of working, urban intellectual women who were struggling with the dilemma between career and family. In Mao's Socialist China, where women were part of the productive forces and their economic liberation was thus achieved, women nonetheless also shouldered the household responsibility like before. These middle-aged intellectuals who, in the wake of economic reforms and the 'four modernizations', were considered the 'backbone' of the nation were still living in inhuman conditions. In the novella, Sun Yimin cries, '难怪人家说，拿手术刀的不如拿剃头刀的' (No wonder people say that, a barber with a razor in his hand is better than a surgeon with a scalpel) (Shen, 1981: 204). 'By 1986, manual workers were earning about 10 per cent more than their intellectual counterparts. The seven million Chinese who worked for state-controlled research institutes, schools and universities were paid meagre salaries' (Grasso et al., 2009: 229).

As we can see, women in the works of both Shen Rong and Zhang Jie are dedicated, hard-working women who have a strong sense of responsibility. Both these writers, who were born during the war of resistance and were in their 30s during the Cultural Revolution, have a strong sense of social responsibility. That perhaps springs from their hard life experiences during the Cultural Revolution and the unshakeable faith in socialism. Therefore, it may perhaps be said that even though they are somewhat disillusioned with the condition of women in the society, they are not disillusioned with socialism.

Zhang Jie, in *The Ark*, writes of a woman of her own age group (those who were in their 30s during the Cultural Revolution), "She possessed neither the unshakeable optimism of previous generations, nor the blind pessimism of the younger generation. Her generation was the most confident, the most clear-minded and the most able to face up to reality". Zhang, like many of her contemporaries, retains socialism as an ideal and envisions women's emancipation within that larger social context' (Roxann, 1990: 49). Shen Rong through Han Lamei describes the experience of an old revolutionary through Cultural Revolution, who even after suffering so much has a strong faith in socialism. Lu Wenting is so dedicated to her work that she is driven

almost to death. In *Emerald*, Zeng Linger agrees to work with Zuo Wei '即不是为了对左崑的爱或恨，也不是为了对卢北河的怜悯。而是为了对这个社会，做一些有意义的奉情' (not for her love or hatred for Zuo Wei, not out of sympathy for Lu Beihe, but to do something of significance for this society) (Zhang, 1984: 25). In *The Ark*, Liu Quan says, 'When no one bore responsibility, there was no way you could fight' (Zhang, 1986: 146).

Love: spiritual and selfless

Love emerged as a recurrent theme in the works of contemporary women writers. Zhang Jie dealt with this issue in her works *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* and *Emerald*. In *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, Zhong Yu, even though she is deeply in love with this man, has to live her entire life satisfied with just a glimpse of him here and there. Her love for this old cadre is pure, selfless and innocent. Even though they are passionately in love with each other, they 'never even once clasped hands'. Shanshan's mother Zhong Yu lives in this world of fantasy that she has created for herself. As Liu points out, '他们之间的这种爱超越了婚姻、法律的制约，也超越道德文化的束缚，甚至不受承载肉体的局限，作为一种精神直到永恒，'不管他们变化什么，他们仍然相爱'，这是张洁的永恒的爱情理想' (Their love was beyond marital and legal constraints, it was also beyond the fetters of moral culture, it didn't accept the limitations of the flesh, being a kind of spiritual eternal love, 'no matter how they change, they will always love each other', and this is Zhang Jie's idea of an ideal eternal love) (Liu, 2009: 66). The presence of this all-consuming, innocent and selfless love can also be seen in *Emerald* where Zeng Linger's love for Zuo Wei is so pure and selfless that she sacrifices her entire life for him. For her, 'if you love, then don't talk about sacrifice'. Shen Rong in *Springtime Forever* introduces us to Han Lamei's love for Li Mengyu. The love that they share is more spiritual, and they are bound not just by the social ties of marriage but a stronger, everlasting common faith in the revolution and struggle to realize socialism. Han Lamei never marries again and keeps her half of the war blanket with her always. Li Mengyu remembers '这半条军毯，记载着我和她的悲欢离合' (this half war blanket has recorded our joys and sorrows) (Shen, 1981: 104). Lu Wenting in the hospital is coming in and out of consciousness, and in her dreamlike state can hear Fu Jiajie reciting poems to her. Their love is based on mutual understanding and respect for each other's work. She loves him so much that she is willing to take on the full responsibility of home and children so he could focus on his work.

事实上，在80年代，女性已经获得了经济上的独立，已不再在物质上依靠男性，那么，她们对于爱情更希望的是精神上的契合，追求心灵价值的美好。(The fact is, in the 1980s, women were already economically independent, were no longer dependent on men for material things, therefore, they hoped for a spiritual connection in love, pursued a beautiful love of spiritual value) (Liu, 2009: 66). Therefore, from the previous examples, we can perhaps deduce that women in contemporary China were looking for love in their relationships, a love that was based on spiritual connection.

Zhang Jie in her works paints love in different colours: Zhong Yu's all-consuming love for the old cadre and Zeng Linger and Lu Beihe's self-sacrificing love for Zuo Wei. Their love to a certain extent seems to be self-destructive too. Zhang Jie's idea of love seems to be fantastic, whereas Shen Rong's idea of love is more practical, grounded and based on intellectual compatibility.

Marriage: only for love

Zhang Jie broke ground with her work by advocating the choice of marrying or not marrying for women. She advocated that it was better to be single than to live in a loveless marriage. In *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, Shanshan, in the end, cries,

Mind your own business! Let us wait patiently for our counterparts. Even waiting in vain is better than loveless marriage. To live single is not such a fearful disaster. I believe it may be a sign of a step forward in culture, education and the quality of life.

(Zhang, 1986: 8)

In her story *Emerald*, Zeng Linger refuses Zuo Wei's marriage proposal because she knows he doesn't love her; instead, she lives her entire life alone. *The Ark* is a story of three women who have decided to live alone because they refused to be in a loveless marriage. Zhang writes in *The Ark*,

As people get older they become clearer about some things and one such realisation is about how difficult marriage is. They begin to see marriage as a tragedy or, if not a tragedy, a lottery in which only a few win a fortune.

(Roxann, 1990: 58)

This disillusionment with marriage can also be seen in the works of Shen Rong. In *At Middle Age*, Lu Wenting wonders, '或许，一生的

错误就在于结婚。不是人常说吗，结婚是恋爱的坟墓。(Perhaps, the biggest mistake in life is marriage. Don't people often say, marriage is the grave of love) (Shen, 1981: 221). Here, her disillusionment with marriage is not because of an unhappy married life like the three women characters in *The Ark* but the monotony of it and the responsibilities it brings, especially for women. Lu Wenting is forever haunted by the guilt of not being the 'virtuous wife and good mother', the traditional role of a woman in a patriarchal society. Traces of these old ideas still linger in society. In *Too Lazy to Divorce*, Liu Shuhuai, when asked to describe his idea of an ideal family, replies, '我理想中的家庭应该有两间房子'. (The ideal family should have a two room house). (Shen Rong)

Zeng points out, '由于独特的创作思维定势和审美取向的影响，谌容在透视这些婚姻家庭问题时，其表现视点与其他女作家的同类题材作品是有所不同的。张洁的《方舟》、《祖母绿》等作总是直接凸现婚姻家庭内容，倾注全身心去关切女性的自我解放和自我价值的实现等女性问题。谌容则善于将对女性世界的审视与对外部世界的观照紧密胶合在一起，往往从生活的多种角度来写婚姻爱情家庭，把目光投向包括女性生活在内的广阔人生，而不单单是针对'女性问题'。(Owing to a unique creative mindset and aesthetic orientation, Shen Rong, when reflecting on issues of marriage and family, her viewpoint differs from that of the other women writers' works on the similar themes. Zhang Jie's works like *The Ark*, *Emerald* directly highlights the issues of marriage and family, She devotes her heart and soul into realizing women issues of self-liberation and self-worth, Shen Rong however excels in gluing together the examination of female world and contemplation of external world, she often writes about love, marriage and family from different angles of life, sets our sight on the broad life which includes the problems of women and not only 'women's issues') (Zeng, 1994: 53)

However, I think that even though their approach to these issues is different, both Zhang Jie and Shen Rong have through their works promoted love to play an important role in marriage. Where in *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, Zhang Jie raises her voice against loveless marriage, in *The Ark*, she describes how it is better to separate than to stay in a loveless marriage. Shen Rong in *Too Lazy to Divorce* brings to light how difficult and miserable one's life becomes if one stays in a loveless marriage through the characters of Liu Shuhuai and Feng Lan.

Society: socialist or traditional?

Chinese society after liberation had undergone a process of elimination of every aspect of traditional, feudal Confucian culture, but even after decades of this process of eliminating Chinese traditional culture,

traces still existed. As Charles Burton in his book opines, 'The Chinese cultural tradition is, after all, a living tradition' (Burton, 1990: 102). The Chinese traditional ideas still existed in society and informed the social behaviour of men and women. Women who did not conform to the traditional morality were seen as social outcasts.

The society that Zhang Jie and Shen Rong paint for us in their works is a society that still frowns upon single women. In *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, Shanshan has to bear the brunt of the society because she is 30 and single. She has an eligible suitor, but she doesn't love him. In *Emerald*, Zeng Linger, being an unwed mother, had to suffer utmost humiliation, people treat her as an outcast, and one man even kicks her in the belly when she is pregnant. The idea of a woman pregnant and without a husband is utterly disgraceful to the people in the society.

‘事实上，在那个年代，人们的思想虽然受到了所谓的解放，但是根植于人们心中的还是中国传统的思想’ (In fact, at that time, even though people's thoughts had so called liberated, the Chinese traditional thought was still deep rooted in their minds) (Liu, 2009:67). ‘在当时的中国，人们若要离婚就必需面对街坊四邻、居委会、单位领导、亲戚朋友，以及法院人员走马灯似的调停劝说，直到被折腾得精疲力竭，还不一定能如愿离’ (In China at that time if people wanted to divorce they had to face and persuade the neighbours and the neighbourhood unit leaders, relatives and friends, as well as officers of the court going around like a revolving door until one was too exhausted and wouldn't even want to divorce) (Zeng, 1994: 52) With the implementation of marriage laws, women had the right to marriage and divorce but the societal pressure was tremendous. The protagonist in Shen Rong's novel *Too Lazy to Divorce*, as the name itself suggests, is just 'too lazy to divorce'. In the same work, Fangfang, the female protagonist who is a reporter, wants to write a piece on divorce, but her boss does not approve of the idea.

Zhang Jie describes in her work *The Ark* how all three women characters had to suffer for being separated or divorced. Liu Quan's father was not in favour of her marriage, but her decision to get divorced was totally unacceptable. Zhang writes,

So ultimately it seemed as though the ancient customs, handed down over thousands of years, dictated that she should stick to her husband, for better or for worse. Although her father had studied in England, returning with all the regalia of his Western education, his thinking was still bound up by these traditions. In this respect, at least, we have not yet conquered Confucius.

(Zhang, 1986: 141)

They also have to suffer unwelcome advances in the professional arena. Liu Quan's boss, Manager Wei, harasses her and tries to hamper her career.

Therefore, we can see China undergoing economic reforms was still carrying traces of its traditional past. The writers though were allowed freedom of expression but any works that did not conform to the traditional morality or traditional image of women were criticized, and works that did conform to this image were praised. 'Zhang Jie was accused (among other things) of "petty bourgeois tendencies", depicting immorality and lacking revolutionary radiance in "Love ity in "The Ark"' (Roberts, 1989: 801). 'Shen Rong received critical acclaim and recognition for presenting a "brilliant image of the socialist new person"' (Jiang, 2000: 134) through Lu Wenting in her work *At Middle Age*.

Conclusion

There is no theory which accounts for the oppression of women in its endless variety and monotonous similarity cross-culturally and throughout history – with anything like the explanatory power of the Marxist theory of class oppression (Rivkin, 1998: 534). Many feminists have thus explained the issue of men-women inequality and the subordination and suppression of women using Marxist theory. Women as seen by Marxists are oppressed under a capitalist society where they are treated as objects and a means to an end, which is to achieve surplus wealth. Therefore, the oppression is class based more than it is gender based. Mao influenced by Marxist understanding of class differences saw women as a major force in the cause of class struggle and building of a socialist state. Men and women were equal in the sense that a man or a woman belonging to proletariat class is invariably oppressed and exploited by the bourgeois class, and therefore any class struggle will depend on the participation by women. Catharine MacKinnon says, 'Women's liberation becomes a pre-condition, a measure of society's general emancipation, part of the superstructure, or an important aspect of the class struggle' (MacKinnon, 1982: 525). Mao's ideology of gender equality dominated Chinese society for many decades after the establishment of PRC where men-women equality was equated with men-women 'sameness'. Women enjoyed political, economic and legal rights in Mao's China, but the vestiges of gender oppression lingered. Post-Mao China saw the process of economic liberalization that brought different facets to the "women's question".

Women under Deng's economic reform were faced with new different challenges and began to discover or re-discover the "female consciousness" which was buried during Mao's era under state rhetoric of men-women equality and class struggle.

Zhang Jie and Shen Rong, two of the representative women writers of contemporary Chinese literature, have through their works very sensitively dealt with social issues that plagued the Chinese society after the Cultural Revolution. The women in the works of both Zhang Jie and Shen Rong are strong, hard-working women who have faith in socialism and have a strong sense of social responsibility, which probably springs from their life experiences, where they participated in the revolution to build a strong socialist nation. Therefore, they present women who are strong and dedicated to their cause. It may be also because that's how they perceived women but that may also be because that's how society expects them to be.

As Zeng states that Shen Rong, '对广阔的社会生活及其存在的问题加以反映和探讨，这是湛容有别于其他女作家的创作特色和创作追求之所在# 当然，从另一个意义上说，这又在一定的程度上隐匿和削弱了她创作中女性的特质和察赋，我们由此会感到，湛容不仅仅是一个‘女作家’，更是一个‘作家’。(reflects on and explores vast social life and the problems that exist in it, this is where lies the difference between Shen Rong and other women writers' creative features and creative pursuits. Of course in other sense, this to a certain extent covers and weakens the femininity of the female characters in her creations, from this we feel, Shen Rong is not just a 'woman' writer but is more a 'writer') (Zeng, 1994: 50). Zhang Jie, in one of her interviews with May Wu, said,

I am a writer. I don't think the term "feminist writer" has any substantive meaning. When I write, I have in mind all the people in the world. Although I am not against feminism, I don't think it has any substantial meaning in contemporary life. Inequality, unequal treatments, exists universally. To treat inequality only as a problem between the sexes is to underestimate the gravity of the problem.

(May Wu, 1986: 9)

This tells us that both these women writers do not consciously bring up the issues facing women in contemporary China, but even though they are not 'women writers' and just 'writers', the female subjectivity with which they write is hard to miss. As Hui Wu said, 'Post-Mao women write to win women's human rights' (2010: 412). They are

fighting for human dignity that is not seen from gendered perspective but aim at a more human world with women and men living in harmony with equality.

Even though Shen Rong deals with social issues and not purely women issues, her work brings to light the problems in society from the point of view of a woman. For example, Lu Wenting in *At Middle Age* is struggling with the guilt of not being a good wife and a good mother. This dilemma between career and family that Lu Wenting struggles with is the dilemma that Chinese women were struggling with at that time. Being professional women, they had to participate in the process of modernization, supporting the family economically, 'holding up their half of the sky' and being a 'virtuous wife and a good mother'. Lu Wenting is so guilt ridden for not being a good wife and a good mother that even in her stupor she begs her husband Fu Jiajie to buy their son sports shoes and plait their daughters' hair, things she could not do owing to her busy schedule where she is performing consecutive surgeries. This guilt and self-accusation is the product of a deep-rooted female consciousness in a traditional society. Shen Rong has through this image of Lu Wenting raised the issue not only of intellectuals' but also of women's dilemma.

Zhang Jie has, to a greater degree, presented the discrimination faced by women and their inner conflicts. She firmly supports women's right to marriage and their liberation. Zhang Jie in one of her works writes, 'True liberation was more than gaining improvement of economic and political status; it was also necessary that women develop confidence and strength in order to realise their full value and potential' (Zhang, 1986: 156).

Chinese women had after the liberation enjoyed political, legal and economic freedom, but their female subjectivity had been suppressed for too long. For a long time, there was no female perspective to write from; that there was a large inflow of works of fiction by women writers after the Cultural Revolution, therefore, is not surprising. It informs us that the need among the women writers to express themselves was great. Women started to use literature as a method to voice their concerns in a rapidly developing Chinese society. Their struggle within society to make their voices heard is, as we can see, ongoing, and they have still not broken the shackles of age-old cultural tradition. But they have started confronting and acknowledging these issues by standing up for their rights, and by doing that, they are on the path of self-liberation and emancipation. Hopefully, there will come a time when this line from Zhang Jie's novel *The Ark* will no longer be true: 'You will be especially unfortunate because you are a woman'.

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